

Council Member Ernest Y. Martin, Chair & Presiding Officer
Council Member Ikaika Anderson, Vice Chair
City Council, City & County of Honolulu
Honolulu Hale, Honolulu, Hawaii

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HEARING Wednesday, March 21, 2012
2:00 pm
City Council Chamber

RE: Bill 10 (2012), Relating to the Use of Bags Provided to Customers

Chair Martin, Vice Chair Anderson, and Members of the Honolulu City Council:

Retail Merchants of Hawaii (RMH) is a not-for-profit trade organization representing 200 members and over 2,000 storefronts, and is committed to support the retail industry and business in general in Hawaii. Through November 2011, retail generated \$25.6 billion in sales and paid over \$1 billion in GET. The retail industry is one of the largest employers in the state, employing 25% of the labor force.

RMH stands in strong opposition to this proposal that prohibits businesses from providing nonbiodegradeable plastic bags to their customers at the point of sale.

With the exception of reusable bags, the stated preferable alternatives in this bill, recyclable paper bags and compostable bags, are NOT viable substitutes and have serious negative environmental and higher cost implications. In the counties which have banned plastic bags, many businesses have opted to provide paper bags. Suppliers report that the number of paper bags sold to merchants is double that of plastic – consumers request that cashiers “double-bag” their groceries to prevent breakage.

Recyclable paper bags are up to ten times more expensive than plastic, in actual purchase price and in increased shipping costs to Hawaii. For every one truck that delivers plastic bags, seven trucks are needed to deliver the same number of paper bags; this volume measure is critical for ocean freight. These costs will be passed on to the consumer. Additionally, there are serious environmental impacts of air and water pollution and green house gas emissions with the paper. From the ULS Report (<http://use-less-stuff.com/research.htm>): paper bags generate 70% more air and 50 times more water pollutants than plastic bags.

Compostable bags: The Biodegradable Products Institute’s website provides this statement: Compostable bags are designed to disintegrate and biodegrade quickly and safely **when composted in a professionally managed composting facility**. Lacking this kind of facility, these bags will have the same impact on the landfill as paper bags.

We respectfully ask your consideration of the approach currently moving in the legislature (SB2511, SD2, HD2) that essentially levies a 10-cent fee on single-use bags, with the goals of reducing the environmental impact of both paper and plastic AND creating a dedicated source of funding for watershed protection, restoration and reacquisition. This position is a practical and manageable option to an outright ban on plastic bags and places the responsibility for the careless discard and misuse, or the wise re-use and management, of these items on the consumer. Hawaii’s retailers unquestionably support the broadest use of reusable tote bags as the ultimate solution for the environment. However, we do know that consumers’ acceptance and use of reusable bags will not be universal or practical at all times.

We believe this legislation will achieve your objective to reduce the nonbiodegradeable plastic bags as well as other single-use bags without adding financial burden to Honolulu’s already strained budget. We respectfully ask that you hold Bill 10. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this measure.

Carol Pregill, President

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